

country and who come back from war wounded or traumatized. The Bush administration is cutting funding to all of these people—our nurses, teachers, and seniors—while spending billions in Iraq every month.

As we start a new hurricane season, I look back on Hurricane Katrina and I see the terrible price the people of the Gulf Coast paid when their National Guard troops were away in Iraq and unable to protect them here at home. Our homeland is simply less secure when our National Guard and Reserves are being kept in permanent rotation away in Iraq.

Clearly, it is time to change the course; we need a new direction in Iraq.

That's why I am supporting the Levin and Kerry amendments today.

The Senate has already spoken saying that 2006 must be a year of transition. That is why the Levin amendment says that we must begin transitioning out troops now while still protecting our people and helping with security. With the Levin amendment, we make it clear that the time has come to change the course, rather than stay the course.

I am also supporting Senator KERRY's amendment which takes the first and most important step by setting a date of July 1, 2007 to have all U.S. troops transition except those critical to training Iraqi security forces, working on specialized counterterrorism operations, and protecting our U.S. personnel and facilities, like our embassy.

Let us be clear. This amendment does not say we should remove all of our troops from Iraq right now.

With this amendment, we are saying that it is time for Iraqis to take responsibility for their own destiny.

With this amendment, we are sending a message that over the course of the next year, the Iraqis must take full control of their own country, their own security, and their own future.

With this amendment, we are saying that we respect the message of the Iraqis' own elected, sovereign government. At a time when the Iraqis have put in place the entire cabinet of the elected government of Prime Minister Maliki; at a time when the United States and coalition forces have trained and equipped more than 116,000 Iraqi soldiers and more than 148,000 Iraqi police and other security forces; at a time when sectarian violence has taken over terrorism as the most serious security threat in Iraq; at a time when 69 out of the 102 army combat battalions, are either soon able to take the lead or able to operate independently, isn't it time for the Iraqis to start taking responsibility for their own destiny?

In fact, the Iraqis have made this point themselves. The Iraqi National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie

said in a Washington Post article this week:

Iraq has to grow out of the shadow of the United States and the coalition, take responsibility for its own decisions, learn from its own mistakes, and find Iraqi solutions to Iraqi problems, with the knowledge that our friends and allies are standing by with support and help should we need it.

He also said that the eventual removal of coalition troops "will help the Iraqis, who now see foreign troops as occupiers rather than the liberators they were meant to be" and that "the removal of foreign troops will legitimize Iraq's government in the eyes of its people." Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki supports a transfer of responsibility for 16 out of 18 provinces by the end of 2006 and his security adviser believes that we can reduce coalition forces to less than 100,000 by the end of this year with most of the multinational force gone. The Iraqis are clearly saying that they are ready for this transition to happen.

A few days ago, Republican Senators made a great deal of Iraqi sovereignty when I, and Senator NELSON, proposed a Sense of the Senate amendment that urged the government of Iraq not to grant amnesty for those who had killed U.S. soldiers.

We heard a lot about sovereignty.

If the Iraqis are to be respected as a sovereign government, as many argued on the floor of the Senate a few days ago, shouldn't we respect their knowledge and wishes as it relates to the very issue of troop redeployment and their ability to sustain their own security?

It is only when the Iraqis and the rest of the world know there is a certain timeframe for a real transition that they will make the hard choices, negotiations, and compromises to maintain a stable government of national unity. It is time for the U.S. to cap the open-ended commitment of U.S. forces in Iraq and to "remove the training wheels" on the Iraqi security forces. The sooner the Iraqi security forces believe they are fighting for their country, the sooner they help stop the sectarian violence. Until that happens, the fledgling Iraqi Government will continue to rely on U.S. forces to keep them from making the difficult decisions and taking tough actions. It is time for the Iraqis to step up to the plate.

Clearly, it is essential to set a date certain for transition so that Iraqis will take responsibility for their country.

It is also essential to set this date certain for transition so that the international community will start to take responsibility for reconstruction and security in Iraq, as well.

The United States cannot go it alone; we must internationalize reconstruction, security, and create an international process to end sectarian vio-

lence. It is in everyone's interest to create a stable and secure Iraq. That is why I support the proposed Summit in Senator KERRY's amendment which brings together all of the players—the EU, NATO, the UN, and Iraq's neighbors—to come up with a plan to solve the political problems, to deal with the militias, and to revive reconstruction efforts.

And this Summit will also deal with a key issue to Iraq's stability—oil. Ultimately, all parties need to be brought in to the process and share the oil profits whether through a national fund or some form of revenue sharing. We cannot forget that Iraq has the fourth largest oil reserves in the world. The goal is to reduce insurgent attacks, improve security along the pipeline and create strong oversight over current pipeline reconstruction. The Iraqis need a stable income stream to restore economic stability and help pay for reconstruction and security so we must get oil production back above prewar levels.

I also believe that our worldwide troop deployment must reflect our priorities in the fight against terrorism. Senator KERRY's amendment creates an over-the-horizon troop presence in case we need to deal with other terrorist issues or regional security issues. With the reduction of troops in Iraq we will be able to redeploy certain troops to other key areas, such as Afghanistan. And we will also be able to bring our National Guard and Reserves home to prevent another terrorist attack on our soil and to help during natural disasters.

Let me conclude by saying that there are those who want to politicize the war to present the American people with a false choice—either stay the course by keeping our troops in Iraq or empower the terrorists by cutting and running. I would ask all of you not to fall into the trap of this false choice or simplistic solutions.

Let me be clear, this amendment is not a simplistic choice to leave Iraq today and to let it fall into the hands of the terrorists.

With this amendment, we will begin to fulfill the transition the Senate voted for and the Iraqis have said they intend to pursue.

With this amendment, we are voting to leave sufficient troops in Iraq at the end of that year to fight counterterrorism, to finish training Iraqi forces, and to protect our people and our embassy.

With this amendment, we are voting to put troops over-the horizon in case of other terrorist activity or regional conflict.

With this amendment, we are voting to create regional stability and get the international community to the table.